

# A Trio of Paradoxes

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**Bible Text:** Galatians 2:20  
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Galatians 2:20. That's the text I want to look at. Many of you have this memorized. It is a short but rich verse, one of the first verses I memorized as a new Christian years ago, and it's a text that probably is familiar to you even if you haven't memorized it. Galatians 2:20,

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

There is a lot of truth packed into that one simple statement. In fact, we're not going to try to cover it all this morning but this is a marvelous summary of Paul's whole theology packed into a single verse. It's one sentence in the King James Version, it's three sentences in the English Standard Version, which is what I'm using, and I like the way they have broken that verse into three sentences because each sentence highlights a unique point, so it's a classic three point outline packed into one verse and that's the way we're going to deal with it today.

Here you have almost every facet of salvation compressed into a wonderfully concise confession of faith, actually, that focuses deliberately on the personal nature of justification and faith and our perfect union with Christ. And the language is almost poetic, "I have been crucified but I live. Yet not I but Christ. I now live my life in the flesh but by faith." Those are oxymoronic statements. Paul employs the language of oxymoron in this verse. You understand what an oxymoron is, the only kind of moron I like. Oxymoron, it's a figure of speech that uses the language of paradox. It's a play on words, really. It's an expression that appears at first sight to be self-contradictory, words that you wouldn't think go together but surprisingly they communicate a truth. Like jumbo shrimp. Or plastic drinking glasses. You know, or seriously funny. Or educational television. And I love oxymorons because they grab your attention and they make you think. Think about this: tight slacks. Nothing much. You know, awfully nice. We love to put words together that don't really go together. You know, boneless ribs. Or self-help group. Or civil war. Or original copies. There are tons of these in English. Did you ever think about these things? You know, why do we call them apartments when they are all together? And why is a boxing ring square? Our language is full of oxymorons. We love the juxtaposition of words and ideas that don't usually go together that because they make

the real point stand out maybe more clearly and that's what Paul is doing here. He is playing with ideas, not just words but ideas and, in fact, many truths in the Christian life are best expressed in oxymorons, paradoxical language, and in our text Paul uses a trio of paradoxes to sum up the reality and the fullness of our salvation in Christ. Look at them. He says, "I am crucified yet living. Yet not I but Christ. And the life I live in the flesh is spiritual, energized by faith." So I want to look at those three paradoxes one at a time and try to unpack some of the truth about our salvation that Paul has condensed into this incredibly rich statement.

Notice first, we'll call it the paradox of death. If you want to take these down, number 1: the paradox of death. He begins this statement by saying he is crucified yet living. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live," and if you understand Paul's whole theology, this is a deep paradox really because before he was crucified, Paul was actually dead. He says so in Ephesians 2:5 where he says, "We were dead in our trespasses but God made us alive together with Christ." He's speaking there of all of us and describing our old life before conversion when we were dead in trespasses and sins, or as Paul says in Ephesians 4:18, he was darkened in his understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that was in him due to the hardness of his heart. I made that personal to Paul but he makes it personal to all of us. That's the state of all of us before we are converted. Paul is confessing this. He was dead but now as one who is crucified with Christ, he is truly alive for the first time. And Paul has borrowed that paradox directly from the teaching of Christ who said in Matthew 16:25, "whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." That's where this idea comes from. It was Christ's own teaching that you have to die in order to really live.

Now, in what sense was Paul crucified with Christ? You often hear people quote this passage as if Paul was speaking of some sort of deeper life, second level experience that launched him to a higher plane of spiritual living. I've heard speakers use and abuse this passage by applying it to a kind of pietistic idea where we crucify ourselves, crucify our desires, as if Paul were speaking about some kind of spiritual self-flagellation or putting himself on the cross every day by self-denial or whatever. But that's not what Paul has in mind at all and the context makes this clear.

Notice verse 19, "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God." He's talking about being dead to the law; dead in a legal sense; dead as far as the law is concerned; beyond the reach of the law's threats and condemnations. He's saying that the law's ultimate penalty has been paid on his behalf so that the law has no more claim against him. As far as the law is concerned, in other words in the eyes of the law, he is dead. He is legally dead. He's talking here about the doctrine of justification by faith and he says so explicitly back in verse 16, "we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified." But now he's dead to the law. The law has no further claim on him and in our verse, verse 20, he's simply explaining why he is dead in the eyes of the law, "I have been crucified with Christ."

Now again, it goes without saying, I think, that Paul was not suggesting that he was literally and actually placed on a cross alongside Christ. We know that's not the case. He was not crucified with Christ in any literal or historical sense, so what does he mean by this? How was Paul crucified with Christ? And I think it's significant that he expected the Galatians to understand what he was talking about. I think they had heard him preach this truth before, but he explains precisely what he means at the end of the verse and in verse 21 where he says, "the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me," he's saying "for me as my substitute," and therefore Paul says, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." He's saying that the death of Christ was for him, on his behalf. In other words, Jesus' death counted as Paul's death legally. "Christ," Paul says, "gave himself for me. For me. He died in my place. He stood in for me as my proxy and my substitute before the judgment seat of God and he took my punishment," and that's what the expression "for me" means in this context, "instead of me."

Death is the legal penalty of sin and Christ died the worst, most horrific kind of death punishment anyone could ever mete out, a sinner's death. He died in such a way "for me," and if he did that, then he could have only done it in my place as my substitute and as my representative because Christ was no sinner. He didn't deserve to die that way. And that's exactly what Paul says in Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" In other words, that kind of death, by crucifixion or hanging on a tree, it is appropriate for someone who is cursed and Christ wasn't cursed, he was no sinner, why did he die this way? Paul says, "He did it in my place, for me." So it's clear that what Paul aims to teach here in Galatians 2:20 is the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice. This is a text about substitutionary atonement.

Now that's a doctrine that is greatly under attack these days and this is not a text that your mind might first go to to think in defense of the principle of substitutionary atonement. The problem is if you take the idea of substitutionary atonement away, if you explain that doctrine away, this verse doesn't really mean anything meaningful. And you see, legally if Christ bore the penalty of my sin legally on my behalf, then it is as if I was crucified with him because in the eyes of the law, that was my sin being atoned for, that was my death by proxy, that was the portion of divine wrath I deserved so, Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ."

Now, pay attention to the context here. He's explaining what he means in verse 19 when he says, "through the law I died to the law." In other words, legally or that's what Paul means by this expression "through the law, legally, in the legal sense I am as good as dead." And so every truth Paul makes reference to in this passage is rooted and grounded in the doctrine of substitutionary atonement; my participation with Christ; my spiritual union with Christ; my fellowship in his death and resurrection; his role as my representative and my proxy. All of that hinges on the truth of substitutionary atonement. Take away substitutionary atonement and you don't have any of those core doctrines of the Gospel, but Christ died as my substitute, that's what Paul is saying.

Now, there have been people throughout the history of Christianity who despise the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. These recent attacks on that doctrine are nothing new. It has been the case throughout Christian history and as a result lots of people have tried to define what Christ's death was all about, why did he die if it wasn't as our substitute.

Some have said he died not as our substitute but as our example, only to give us an example of self-sacrifice and meekness, and what saves us therefore, they say, is not what Christ did for us but what we do to follow his example. It's inevitable that that becomes works religion. That's what virtually all theological liberals and Deists and Socinians and moralists teach, it's works salvation, and that same view has cropped up in several places. Remember the Emerging Church Movement a decade ago, and over the past two decades. Lots of people, most recently there was a lot of publicity about a famous Christian musician who said, who looked at the doctrine of substitutionary atonement and he said, "I don't think that's a glorious truth. I think it's a horrible truth." Well, Scripture agrees with that. It is a stumbling block. It is a shock to the human mind but it is what Scripture teaches. But it's a doctrine that is hated by people who think this makes God look too harsh. He had to demand blood atonement for our sins? How can God be so rigid as to demand a punishment for sin and yet so unwilling to damn people that he would even punish his own Son for the sins of other people? Why couldn't God just declare our sins forgiven without demanding any kind of satisfaction or payment? That's the way the thinking goes and so they say let's reimagine the atonement as an example of Jesus' love or an example of turning the other cheek, and so let's just think of it as an example for us to follow. But again, that turns out to be a recipe for salvation by works because it denies the objective efficacy of Christ's death for me. If he was merely an example for me, then it's still up to me to follow that example if the atonement is going to mean anything.

There have also been people throughout the history of the church who are willing to acknowledge that Christ bore the penalty of sin in a sense, but they insist he didn't do it vicariously. In other words, he didn't really die as anyone's substitute. His death, they say, was merely a public display of how much God hates sin, as a demonstration of what divine wrath would look like if God demanded a payment for sin. And according to that view, God forgives sinners freely, gratuitously, without demanding any kind of payment or ransom for our sins, and so the cross according to that view is just a symbolic gesture, not an actual payment for anyone's sins. And again, that destroys the objective efficacy of Christ's death. It also destroys the truth that explains our union with Christ.

Now, these things are important for us to understand because there is this upsurge of people today who are inclined to argue against the idea of substitutionary atonement. As I said, a lot of people don't like that doctrine because they just can't stomach the idea that God always demands vengeance against sin. They'd rather have a kindly, pliable God who just overlooks sin and says it doesn't really matter and let's just forget about any kind of punishment. That's the kind of God most people imagine. So substitutionary atonement is not a doctrine, frankly, that is well-suited for this postmodern era in which we live. The idea that a loving God would punish the sins of an evil world in the person of his own innocent Son is a truth they find distasteful. It seems unrefined and indelicate. It's an

offense just like the Bible says, "The cross of Christ is a stumbling stone and a rock of offense but to those who believe, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God." The offense of the cross is the very thing we celebrate so don't ever be tempted to back away from it or tone it down or soften the idea just because worldly wisdom finds it offensive. Worldly wisdom will always find it offensive.

More than 100 years ago, Alexander Maclaren pointed out that when people – by the way, substitutionary atonement was under attack in the Victorian era as well when Maclaren was preaching, and he said when people lose sight of the substitutionary nature of Christ's atoning work, they soon lose interest in the cross completely. He said this, "Wherever the full-orbed faith in Christ as our substitute has begun to falter and grow pale, people do not know what to do with Christ's death at all and they stop talking about it to a very large extent." Then he added this, "Unless Christ died as a sacrifice and a substitute for sinners, it's hard to see any meaning in the cross other than a sentimental melodrama." And he's right about that. In fact, what he warned about was exactly what happened among the modernists and theological liberals who were just beginning to be a factor in his day. They ultimately stopped talking about the cross at all and they came up with a moralistic approach to liberal Christianity and it ruined all the mainstream denominations in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, frankly, it's the same thing that's happening today with seeker-sensitive Christianity and postmodern Christianity and open theism and Emerging Christianity and all that's left over from that movement, and all the other varieties of pseudo-Christianity today that are trying to modify the Gospel message in order to make it more palatable for people today.

If you are ashamed of the offense of the cross, you will ultimately silence the only truth that can save and Paul's words in this text reveal the superiority of the doctrine of vicarious atonement, the truth that Christ died as a substitute for sinners. It means that Christ's atoning work is inherently and objectively efficacious. His work on my behalf has already accomplished everything that's necessary for life and salvation. There is no work or ceremony or ritual for me to perform in order to gain life and salvation, but eternal life is already my present possession guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Christ. "I, through the law, am dead to the law," Paul says, "so that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." Jesus himself said, John 5:24, "Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life." He doesn't come into judgment but has passed from death unto life. Eternal life, in other words, is my present possession and the only guarantee of that truth lies in the fact that he has already fulfilled as my substitute, everything that the law of God demands from me. My spiritual union with Christ is what seals the reality of that truth on the personal and practical level; this is the very truth that makes assurance of salvation possible.

Notice, by the way, how this text portrays salvation and our union with Christ as a very personal and individual thing. Notice all the personal pronouns Paul uses in this text, and only when he's talking in a context like this does Paul use first-person pronouns. But he does here, the subjective pronoun "I" is used four times in this one verse, or five times if you're reading the King James Version; and the objective pronoun "me" is used three

times. That's seven or eight first-person pronouns in one verse, one sentence in some versions. Paul's emphasis here is on the personal and individual aspect of salvation. This is not about some corporate or collective notion of covenant membership or the community of Christianity or whatever.

This is about personal salvation and some of you, especially the seminary students in our midst, will be aware of a deadly theological trend that is popular right now in academic circles known as the New Perspective on Paul. It's a wholesale reinterpretation of Paul's theology that departs, to some degree, from every historic Protestant distinctive on the doctrine of justification by faith. It's a move instead back to a kind of more sacramental and corporate theology of justification. It tends to diminish or even eliminate the whole notion of personal justification. According to the New Perspective on Paul, when Paul speaks of justification, he's not talking about how an individual can be right before God, that's the claim they may, but rather he's talking about how Jews and Gentiles can corporately relate to God's covenant. Of course, the most famous proponent of this idea currently is N. T. Wright who is probably the most influential person who holds this view and his influence bleeds into evangelical circles. He says this, "Justification is not so much about soteriology," the doctrine of salvation, "as it is about ecclesiology," the doctrine of the church. It's not so much about salvation as it is about the church, he says. It's a group thing. It's not an individual thing. It's about how diverse groups of people, Jews and Gentiles in particular, how they relate to the covenant community. It's not about an individual's standing before God.

That's the claim he makes but here Paul is very clearly dealing with a personal and individual reality. Verse 16, "we know that a person," that is a private soul, personally, individually, "is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." And in our text Paul is still unfolding that same theme of individual justification and he makes it as personal as possible by declaring his own case, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Not once does he say "us."

The justification he's describing here is a personal and individual reality and this is the paradox of death. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live." Here is the sum of everything that I've been saying in case I went over somebody's head: Paul is describing a personal faith that looks back to the historical event of Christ's death and resurrection and rests in the knowledge that my union with Christ makes me the beneficiary of his death on the cross and a participant in that historical event so that I am dead to the law because Christ died in my place. And as we're about to see, I am alive unto God because I also participate in the spiritual reality of Christ's resurrection.

Now, I want you to see that this same idea is a consistent theme that runs through everything the Apostle Paul ever wrote. He continually says that we are dead because Christ died as our substitute, and by our union with him, we participate spiritually in his death. Galatians 6:14, "far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Or Romans 6:2,

we are dead to sin. How are we dead to sin? Verses 3 and 4, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death." I'm not speaking about water baptism, by the way. It doesn't say anything about baptism into water. It's about baptism into Jesus Christ and therefore baptism into his death. This is the same thing Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12:13 where he says, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit." It's a spiritual baptism that he's talking about. The Holy Spirit is the baptizer in this case, and he baptizes us into Christ. He immerses us in Christ. It's the same spiritual reality as our union with Christ and he says if you are baptized into Christ, united with him spiritually through the agency of the Holy Spirit, then you are baptized into his death, united with him in his crucifixion.

So that's the sense of what Paul is talking about in our text when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ." Crucified but not actually and literally dead. "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live." That's the paradox of death and it flows right into the next paradox. Notice now number 2: the paradox of resurrection. The paradox of resurrection. "I live," he says, "yet it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." I am crucified, yet alive. I am alive, and yet it's not my life. He's building an amazing string of paradoxes here that cover the range of Christian experience. The paradox of death was all about justification. The point here is that faith lays hold of justification by looking back at the historical event of Christ's death. That's the paradox of death, it's about again, justification. The paradox of resurrection is about the very principle of eternal life itself and here you see that faith regenerates and empowers us as we look to the living Christ for life and energy. He is our life. I live but it's not my, my life. Christ is the source of my life. Just as his death counts as my death, his resurrection from the dead both seals my justification and gives me life. I'm alive from the dead because my substitute is alive from the dead and I am united with him by faith.

And Paul is saying the very same thing here that he says in Colossians 3:3, that famous verse where he says, "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." He's talking, again, about our union with Christ. We are united by faith with Christ in such a way that God sees our sin debt paid in full by Christ's death and we are, therefore, brought up from the dead with Christ through his resurrection so that death has no more dominion over us. Our life is safely hidden in his care because it is his life too by union, by our participation with him and his with us. We share the same life.

This is the very same thing Paul says again in Romans 6:8-11, "Now if we have died with Christ," he says, "we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." This is a consistent theme in Paul's teaching. The resurrection of Christ guarantees our life and since death has no more dominion over him and because we are spiritually united with him by faith, our life is also hid with Christ in God and therefore we are secure forever.

I don't know how people who believe you can lose your salvation, I don't know what they do with Colossians 3:3, you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. That's about as secure as it can get. This is an amazing truth and Scripture stresses it over and over. In John 14:19 Jesus said, "Because I live, you also will live." And listen to the next verse, John 14:20, "Because I live, you also will live," now verse 21, "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." Christ is united with his Father in the Father, we are united with him, you in me and I in you, so our life is literally hidden with Christ in God.

By our union with him, we participate in his resurrection life. There is a practical use for this truth. In fact, Paul leaned on this idea to see him through his worst sufferings. Listen to what he says in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10. He's describing his life and ministry and says this, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." You see the same idea here.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Paul says that Christ "died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him." Again, that is the bedrock foundation of our security. In other words, our union with Christ makes us participants not only in his death but also in his resurrection life. So we are crucified with Christ, nevertheless we live, or more precisely, Christ lives in us.

Now, notice another significant thing here in Galatians 2:20. Earlier I showed you how he uses this expression "in Christ" to signify our union with him, our spiritual union. Here he turns that expression around and he shows the flipside of that truth. Here it's not just we who are in Christ but Christ also lives in us. That's how intimate the union is. It's the same thing Jesus said in John 14:20 which I just read a second ago, "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." Think about trying to picture that. You can't do it because you can't put something into something that's itself in that thing. Do you know what I mean? I don't know what I mean but the union is so intimate you could look at it either way, it's Christ in us and us in him. We are so united that we permeate one another.

Listen to Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 3:16-17. He prays for them, "that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." And in Colossians 1:27 he speaks of Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christ lives in us and his resurrection life is what energizes and drives our spiritual life.

We are participants in his resurrection as well as his death so that even though in the eyes of the law we are not only crucified with Christ, we are also alive with him. We are crucified with Christ, nevertheless we live, and in practical terms this ought to teach us to depend on the indwelling Spirit of Christ to empower us. This is a truth that ought to color how we think of ourselves. It teaches us to look beyond ourselves and to lean on Christ who is our life, and that's precisely what Paul says in Romans 6. We keep going back to that passage, Romans 6, because in extended form it says precisely the same



thing as Galatians 2:20. It's like Romans 6 could be a standing commentary on Galatians 2:20. Paul summarizes his whole theology here in our verse but he spells out the same truth in detail in Romans 6. Romans 6, remember, is where Paul says we are buried with Christ in to death by that spiritual baptism that unites us with him. Verse 8 is the one that says, "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him." Verse 9 of Romans 6 says death can have no dominion over him now that he's conquered death and been raised from the dead and then Paul says this, verse 11 of Romans 6, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Do you consider yourself dead and resurrected? If you're truly united with Christ by faith, you should. That's how you should think of yourself. That is reality. It's spiritual reality but it's real. It's more real than anything you can see with your eyes or touch with your hands. This is how God himself sees us and that's how we ought to think of ourselves.

The King James Version of that text uses the word "reckon." It says, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Christ our Lord." It uses a Greek word, *logizomai*, which is the same word that is translated "impute" throughout Romans 4 where we are told that God imputes righteousness apart from works. He credits righteousness to our account, in other words. He reckons us righteous. Romans 4:8 uses the same word when it quotes from Psalm 32 to say that God did does not impute sin to believers. He reckons them guilt free, completely righteous. He imputes to them a righteousness that is not their own and he doesn't impute their own sins to them. That's how the divine reckoning of justification works and that's how we ought to think of ourselves. We should reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, really and truly dead to sin, as far as the law is concerned, beyond the reach of the law is condemnation, therefore freed by death from the guilt of sin, and we're freed from guilt and condemnation by Christ's death because we are united with him, and in legal terms we are participants in his death and we should reckon ourselves therefore well and truly dead to sin.

But it doesn't stop there. We are also alive unto God because we participate in Christ's resurrection as well as his death. So we are alive but it's not our life, it's the resurrection power of Christ. Listen to Paul's words from Philippians 3. This is where he gives his own testimony and talks about what he now wishes now that he has counted all have his previous spiritual advantages as skubalon, dung. Here's what he now wishes for and this should be the longing of every heart that is united with Christ by faith, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." So Christ's death and his resurrection are one package. His death frees us from sin and his life empowers us for righteousness and we lay hold of both of them by faith. That's the paradox of resurrection. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. I live but it's not my life.

So we've seen the paradox of death, we are crucified but living; the paradox of resurrection, we're living but it's the life of Christ in us; now here is a third paradox, we'll call it the paradox of life. The paradox of life and this one is a little more subtle when you read the verse in English but let me show it to you. "The life I now live in the flesh, I live

in faith." That's the literal rendering of the Greek prepositions, "in the flesh and in faith." They are identical parallel expressions in the Greek and it sets up another paradox. While I am living in the flesh, I'm actually living in faith, and faith, not my flesh, is the driving principle of my life as a believer. I'm driven not by my flesh but by my faith. He's talking here about spiritual power, not fleshly power. My true life is not contained in this flesh. The life of my flesh, that is the living, breathing, organic life that is visible to the human life, that is not the true life. My flesh is simply a mask that conceals the true principle of life that energizes me. I live by the faith of the Son of God, or better translated, I live by faith in the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

Now notice this very carefully, he's speaking clearly of the life I now live in the flesh, as opposed to my life before conversion which was really just a kind of walking death, remember, spiritual death, dullness to the things of God, but the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith. Now, notice also that the object of his faith is personal and objective. It's faith in the Son of God, faith in his person and faith in his work. And I want to show you something, don't miss this: all three of these paradoxes hinge on faith. The paradox of death teaches us that it is faith that justifies us as it looks back to the historical event of Christ's death; the paradox of resurrection teaches that faith regenerates and empowers me as it looks to the living Christ for daily life and energy; and here we learn from the paradox of life that faith sanctifies as it conforms us to the image of Christ. It's the same faith in all three cases, by the way. It's not three different acts of faith or three different kinds of faith, it's the same faith. The faith that justifies is the same faith that sanctifies. Verse 16 says we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ. Verse 20, Paul says the life we are living in this flesh while we wait for glory, we're supposed to live in the energy and power of our faith in the Son of God. It's the same faith. It's the same object of faith. It's not a different faith but the object of our faith is always Christ.

By the way, the error of Deeper Life Theology and all brands of perfectionism and No Lordship Doctrine and most forms of Pietism, is that all of them make justification and sanctification hinge on different acts of faith so that you are saved by an act of justifying faith, where you look to Christ as Savior to free you from the guilt of sin, but then they teach that you need to reach a higher level or a second stage of the Christian life by a completely different kind of faith and a completely separate act of faith when you finally surrender all or accept Jesus as Lord or die to yourself or have some kind of existential faith crisis where you move to the next level of spirituality. That is not what Scripture teaches.

The faith that sanctifies is the same faith that looks to Christ as our substitute and our Savior and if you don't realize that, you're going to be hamstrung in the process of your sanctification. Christ's lordship, his sanctifying power and our full surrender of ourselves, all of these are encompassed in the faith that first saves. It may be mustard seed faith, it will grow deeper and mature more as we are conformed more and more to the image of Christ, but it's the same faith and it always looks to the same object, Christ. And while it's proper and vital and important to make a clear theological distinction between justification and sanctification, they are not the same thing, it's nevertheless a mistake to

imagine that the faith that sanctifies is a different faith from the faith that justifies. Both justification and sanctification are accomplished only through a living faith that looks to Christ alone. It's not by distinct acts of faith. It's not by different kinds of faith or different objects of faith but it's one act of living faith that continues and endures, and at the very first moment of faith we are justified, but that faith perseveres and that's what brings about our sanctification. That faith, saving faith, is not only the instrument of our justification, it's also the instrument by which the Holy Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ and that's the very thing Paul is talking about here in this verse.

Notice he's talking about real life in this present world. The life I now live in the flesh, and he says the driving principle of this life is faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. That's the same faith that was born at his conversion on the Damascus Road. That's saving faith he's describing there. It's the only faith Paul ever knew. It's the same faith that he nurtured and cultivated and sustained through his life. It's the faith he spoke of at the end of his life when he wrote to Timothy and said, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith." It's Gospel faith, faith in Christ who loved me and gave himself for me. The object of that faith is the same historic event that procured our justification. That's the proper focus of all true faith. He gave himself for me on the cross which is the greatest manifestation of his love. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." So the cross is the focal point of the faith that empowers a godly life. If you lose sight of the work of Christ for you, you will falter in your attempts to live your life for him.

Now, I've said this before but it bears repeating: if you struggle with besetting sins, if your sanctification seems sluggish or stalled, if you are frustrated in your progress toward Christ-likeness, there is no greater spiritual tonic than to go back to the cross, to fill your mind with Gospel truth, remind yourself of what Christ has done on your behalf as the great high priest who offered himself as an atonement for your sins. That will restore the proper focus of your faith and energize you spiritually to live in the power of his resurrection. Go back to that beginning point is what Christ was telling the church at Laodicea when he said, "You need to return to your first love." Remind yourself that you are dead to sin through the cross but alive to God through the resurrection. Reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin and its power, dead to the claims of the law against you, but alive in the resurrected Christ and remember that faith unites you to him so that his power and his life flow through you. That will do more than all the counseling sessions in the world to set your spiritual compass straight again Your sanctification, no less than your justification is wrought by faith in Christ, not by your own self-effort or fleshly energy. That was Paul's focus and that's the message of our text. All the Christian life is a walk of faith because faith is what unites us with Christ.

Now, what if you're not a true believer in Christ? What relevance does any of this have to you? Can you know with any certainty that he loved you and gave himself for you? And the answer is only if you lay hold of him by faith. Romans 8:9, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ doesn't belong to him." True faith is personal faith. That's one of the lessons of this passage. You can't be in spiritual union with Christ because of the faith of your parents or because of an act of water baptism or because of any other sacrament

or work that you might do. You don't unite with Christ by attending a church or even by joining a church. Only by faith, personal faith, can you be united with Christ and only the Spirit of God can awaken a dead heart to true faith. But Scripture says faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ, and the very fact that you have come under the hearing of the word of God is a token of his mercy and goodness to you, and the Gospel message includes an open invitation, an earnest plea to be reconciled with God. Christ invites all who hear to come to the water of life and drink freely. Revelation 22:17, "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." Isaiah 55:1 says the same thing, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." And then verses 6 and 7 add this, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Jesus gave a similar invitation in John 7, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" And in Matthew 11:28 he said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest." Notice in all those things, no one is excluded from that invitation because everyone who is in bondage to sin is heavily laden. So nothing hinders anyone from coming but their own sinful reluctance. That's the only thing that holds us back from Christ, unbelief.

So if you're here today without being united to Christ in faith, I urge you to turn to him in faith. Come to him. And my prayer for you is that his word and his tender plea will be the instrument by which he draws you to himself. And for those who are in Christ, let this passage be a reminder of your high position when you meditate on it. Feed your faith with its truth and make Christ the pattern for your soul. Make him the motive for your living. Make him the goal of your whole life and then draw on his power and learn to view it as the energizing principle of your earthly existence. Remember, the same faith that looks to Christ for salvation is the faith that lays hold of all his work on our behalf. He loved me. He lived for me. He died for me. And he lives in me. I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Let's pray.

*Father, we are blessed by your grace to us far beyond our ability to show our gratitude, and we confess to our shame that we think too little of what Christ has done to redeem us. Focus our hearts and minds on him as the true object of our faith. Increase our faith, we pray. Bring us to full maturity in perfect Christ-likeness and may he truly live in us in a way that all will see and glorify you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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